

1724

CONSIDERATIONS
UPON
Corrupt Elections.

CONSIDERATIONS



George Peckham.

8.
CONSIDERATIONS

UPON

K. England. -

Commons, House of

Corrupt Elections

OF

MEMBERS

To Serve in

PARLIAMENT.

*— Pudet hæc opprobria,
Et dici potuisse, & non potuisse refelli.*

LONDON,

Printed in the Year MDCCI.

CONSIDERATIONS

UPON

County Elections



MEMBERS

To serve in

PARLIAMENT

Et dicit potuisse, & non potuisse refelli.
——— Pater huc appropriat.

LONDON

Printed in the Year MDCCCL

CONSIDERATIONS

UPON

Corrupt Elections.

IF the Corruption practis'd in many Elections is so Notorious, that in Fact it cannot be deny'd; and if Corruption be a Crime so Gross, that no Man pretends to justify it; sure 'tis allowable to appear in Print with an *Honest English* Freedom upon such a Subject.

In Ancient *Rome* it wou'd have been Honourable to have been a Prosecutor in such a Case. *Plutarch* makes it to be one of the Noblest parts in the Character of *Cato*, That he bound himself in an Oath, that he wou'd be the Accuser of whomsoever he shou'd

B

know

know to have given Money for the purchasing Suffrages in Elections. And there was a Law which appointed Rewards and Honours for those that shou'd Impeach them.

They that are unconcerned in these Ill Practices will have no reason to censure me; and those that are concern'd dare not answer me; for Corruption is so entirely disown'd by all Men, that they who have been guilty of it may endeavour to evade it, but the odious Criminals can never presume to defend it: nor will the Rights and Privileges of Parliament be Invaded by speaking plainly upon this occasion, since all that shall be said is to preserve the Honour and Dignity of Parliaments, and to take off from the House of Commons that Stain of Bribery and Corruption, which many Elections have cast upon it.

The Knights, Citizens, and Burgeses there Assembled are the Representatives of the People of *England*, and are peculiarly empower'd by them to transact concerning their Religion, Lives, Liberties, and Estates; but the Nation may justly complain, that this extensive Jurisdiction should be lodg'd in those Gentlemen who cannot be said to have been
Elected,

Elected, but to have *Bought* the Short-liv'd Privilege of intruding into that House.

A short-liv'd Privilege we hope it will prove; for it will undoubtedly become the Wisdom and Justice of a Parliament, to bring such Corrupting Gentlemen, and their Corrupt Boroughs to immediate Punishment.

The Justice of a House of Commons will not pass over such a Crime; nor their Wisdom allow any delay in the Punishment. By delay, the Bribes and Arts of such Men may spread themselves in the House it self: And if the fatal Contagion shall at any time reach a Majority there, *England* will be lost; for it will be neither able to bear the Disease, nor go through with the Cure.

Of late Years, many steps have been taken in Parliament towards Vindicating and Establishing the Ancient Liberties of the Kingdom. And after we have long Rival'd the *Romans* in their Courage, we begin to aspire to something of their Love of their Country. But this indeed is but begun, and that too with great disadvantages; their Jealousy of their Laws and Liberties grew up with them, and it was many Years before Luxury and Bribery sooth'd and corrupted it. But

But our first motions towards Liberty are clogg'd with Corruption, and the Name of Liberty made use of by many, only to carry on the designs of raising prodigious Estates; or acquiring Places and Titles.

Hence it is, those several Monsters are brought forth, of Friends to the Government at *Thirty per Cent.* Gain by it: Affected Patriots, and real Paricides: Lovers and Devourers of their Country.

And these are Ingendred, by the unnatural familiarity of different Sects and Parties, when they come together to Worship the universal Idol of this Age, *Self-Interest*.

This Disease began in Town, as all Plagues usually do, and has now Infected our Boroughs, who being many of them very Poor, and finding themselves so much Courted since the Triennial Act, have enhanced the price of their Breath proportionable to the demand of the Market; and are arrived at last to substantial Bribery, and solid Corruption.

Before the Act for preventing Charge and Expence in Elections of Members to serve in Parliament, the Kingdom was fallen into an Excessive and Exorbitant way of Entertainment

ment by Eating and Drinking at Elections.

And this is very justly declared by the Preamble of that Act, to be *contrary to the Laws, and in violation to the Freedom due to the Election of Representatives for the Commons of England in Parliament; To the great Scandal of the Kingdom, dishonourable, and may be destructive to the Constitution of Parliaments.*

But the Methods of Bribery, fear'd to have been practic'd since that Act, have not so much as a Taste of the Ancient *English* Hospitality, but are more sordid in their Nature, as well as more dangerous in their Consequence.

There is no Crime but may be aggravated by Circumstances; and if this Corruption that we complain of has proceeded from any Publick Society, that is a Circumstance that makes it more heinous in its self, and more prejudicial to the Constitution of our Government.

If such Corruption be pass'd over, Iniquity will be established in perpetual Succession, with a Common Seal, and with Power to purchase Elections.

C

Then

Then will the Countrey Gentlemen, whose Lands are the Source of all Taxes, and must bear the Burthen of every War, see themselves thrust out of their Boroughs first, and afterwards out of their Inheritances, by a Joint Stock; which, without Ruin, they can neither submit to, nor oppose.

And this without any prospect of Redress, since they and their Families must expect to be so oppress'd by such General Society, their Successors and Assigns.

'Tis usual upon the discovery of any New Port, where the Inhabitants are eager of Trade, for single Persons to open the Traffick first; and when they have succeeded well, then form themselves into a Company; so several single Adventurers, having made good Returns from some Boroughs which they have happen'd to discover, and Business increasing apace, it has been thought most advisable to manage it by a Joint Stock: Accordingly, the Directors and others of the N---E---I---C----- have lanch'd out, and Corruption with them has diffus'd it self in several Rivulets from S-----H---, to meet again in a General Conflux at St. S-----C-----

Great

Great Men, who have been immoderately ambitious, have erected Banks and Funds, and last of all, a New Society to Trade to the *East-Indies*; which might owe their Being, and have a Dependance upon those, under the shelter of which they think to support themselves; and if they find they are tottering in their Prince's Favour, and would force him to make use of them, or prove themselves either necessary for his Service, or dangerous to be disobliged, then they screen themselves under such Funds and Banks, and Companies which they have created.

They begin their Work in the City; and *Trade*, and the *Publick Credit* are the Watch-Words pitched upon: They quit the Presence of Religion, because so often used already; and likewise because the Nerves of Contention upon that Account have been much slackned by the Toleration; nor will it suit with their way of Life or Character: For the truth of it is, the Impudence of Atheism has render'd useless the Arts of Hypocrisy.

The New Cant Words of *Trade* and *Publick Credit*, are the best Devices, in order to make division and confusion among us, that
ever

ever were yet invented; for Religion ranges men closely under their several Standards; but then as it betrays the weakness of each number, so it contracts their Interest.

But a Joint Stock lets in all Parties, and all Religions; 'tis like the Ark which had in it all sorts of Beasts, clean and unclean, but a very small share of Mankind; and it is strange to see how common Interest mollifies their Tempers to one another, and sowers them to all the World besides: How the *Presbyterian* and the *Papist*, the *Independant* and the *Quaker*, lay aside their several Opinions, as to Sacred Matters, to debate calmly of that more important Question, Whether Stock will rise; or how much may be got by the Million Bank, or Circulating *Exchequer* Bills?

The Pretence of Religion makes only Separation; the pretence of Trade, makes universal Distraction and Confusion; which being carried on by Corruption, will sink the Value of Lands proportionably as it raises the Interest of Money, and will end in the utter Ruin of the Nation: Which in such Circumstances can be neither safe under a Peace, or successful in carrying on a War; But 'tis to be hoped,
that

that the House has still many Worthy Gentlemen, who inherit the Spirit of their Grear Ancestors; and that they who have been so jealous of their Liberties in former Cases, when Attempts have been made upon the House of Commons, will not suffer it to be Invaded by the Bribery of a Company so lately framed; nor quietly admit so Open and Encreasing an Evil. There is a vast deal of difference between a few stragling corrupt Members, and form'd Bodies of them: Private Pensions may influence some; Hopes of being made Lords, may prevail upon others; and by splitting of Places, *Quon.* and *Tray* may vote in Couples.

But these are but the Militia of Bribery, and may be dispersed; but when Corruption is regulated in a Company, they become more dangerous than a Standing Army; because, if they have a Majority, they may raise Money to pay an Army if they think fitting, and make an Act to perpetuate Themselves.

Cataline was no very awkward Parricide. He took as probable Steps towards the Ruin of his Country, as ever Man did, and yet his Policy consisted chiefly in corrupting the Young Gentlemen of *Rome*, in giving them Horses and

D

Dogs,

Dogs, and in humouring them in their several Vices.

But this was tedious and uncertain Work; their Lewdness mingled too much with their Politicks, till the very prostituted Women took pity of their Country, and saved Rome from its looser Gentry. Had there been a Company that must be supported by Means as unwarrantable as its Institution was unjust; or a Bank or Publick Funds; *Cataline* had got in with the Directors, or been one of them, and certainly carried his Point. Though the persons that have, as 'tis fear'd, by Bribery, carried many Elections, and attempted more, are very numerous; and have shewed so much Power and Confidence of late, yet this depends chiefly upon their being so well headed; which still makes them the more dangerous: For it is not a few Merchants and Shopkeepers that make all this bustle, but Gentlemen of a higher Degree, and greater Figure in the World, who think the City has an everlasting Stock of Contention at their Service, and that secure behind the publick Funds, imagine, once again, to oppress the Kingdom.

But

But alas, 'tis as weak to hope to secure ones self behind a Multitude of Trading People, as to think to conceal Miscarriages under a Vain-Glorious Preamble; 'tis very strange for persons to fall a Trading again, who have once had so ill luck already: A Company may run away with their Charter, and exceed it as much as a Ship's Crew have already their Commission; and amidst the Temptations of Profit and Opportunity, turn Pyrates too, and cause their Authors and Supporters to be questioned; And then who can pity them? For as Honest *Edmund Spencer* says---

*The Sovereign of the Seas, he blames in vain,
Who, when once (Kidnapt) will to Sea again.*

But this is certain, that if these Men that crowd into the House thus corruptly and tumultuously, should be disappointed, as 'tis the hopes of all good *Englishmen* they will, then they will turn upon their Leaders to revenge themselves; and therefore they that lead them must Employ all their Forces, their Wit, their Power, and their Interest to support them.

Now

Now as this must give them so much more Strength, so it must make them so much more dangerous; and therefore the more necessary must it be to Inquire into these things speedily.

But further, to make the Dangers of such Practices yet more plain, let us consider the Ill Consequences, if Boroughs shall be suffer'd to be saleable, and if one Joint Stock shall be allowed to buy them up; 'tis possible; nay, 'tis as reasonable too, that other Joint Stocks should attempt the same; and then, I beseech you, consider what a condition the Constitution of our Government is in.

The *Quakers* have a very great Stock always by them, and this they are able to increase at a very little Warning, to a very great degree, whenever they think fitting: It has been reckon'd that these People understand Buying and Selling, as well as any in the World: But if so, then they also may secure to themselves so many Representatives, by the same Methods, and their Agents, which are not *Quakers*, manage so for them in the Borough-Market, as to purchase a Majority, and get themselves Voted good Christians.

Besides

Besides these, the Jesuits and other Regulars, have several Lands in this Nation, concealed and managed, for 'em by Mercenary Attorneys; a great stock might be raised by these, upon occasion, with vast additions of what will certainly be contributed by others of their Party, many of which are very Wealthy and by this means may they Repeal the Laws which are in Force against 'em, with much more ease than they were obtained.

But what is not less probable, but much more dangerous still, we have been at a great Expence of Blood and Money, to keep our King *James*, and the name of *Jacobite* has been long terrible and odious among us; but if this be Justly and Reasonably so, nay if the *Jacobite* Party be but half so great as has been supposed; they may not only add further to the Monks Stocks, and prove their Tools in the Purchasing of Boroughs, but the *French* King might also joyn his Purse too, and send over at any Dissolution, to Buy our Towns as he does our Houses, to charge against us upon 'em. This may be done with more Cunning and Secrecy, than some wise men have thought fitting to proceed withal. Infomuch

E

that

that in a little time this method of Corrupting, if connived at, may make way not only for the worst of Enthusiasts, but even for our ancient Enemy, for Popery it self to enter among us.

And then, what neither their Learning, Force, nor Treachery could attain in so many Years, shall be done by our own consents.

And what is still more worthy our Consideration, is, how often we must incur this danger over and over again, in a little time, if we do not actually fall into it immediately.

If what has been said should seem any thing Improbable, or not likely to take Effect, the the First, Second, Third --- nay allowing not the Twentieth Attempt, yet it may do so at last. And Generous and Publick-Spirited Patriots will consider, not the present Age alone, but have Regard to Posterity. But we have no occasion for this Reserve, a very little time may give a fatal demonstration of the nearness of the danger of such Methods. Every one must be sensible of the general corruption of the present Age.

How many there are who would be glad to make their Peace on t'other side the Water,
(espe-

(especially considering the Case of the Succession) and willingly Enjoy quietly the sudden Estates which have been forc'd up unnaturally from Funds and Joint-Stocks, as from so many Hot Beds: Every one must know also the Indefatigable Industry of Popish Bigots, who are as Keen and Hungry still, and withal as Sanguine and Insolent, as before 1588. nay as if they had never been disappointed at all. And therefore let all these things be lay'd together Impartially, and then you must see, and not without some Terror sure, how many opportunities People thus disposed, will have of putting their designs in Execution, by the same ways that have been practis'd, since the King is obliged to call a new Parliament every Three Years.

The Triennial Act was intended for the safety and glory of the Nation, for the giving the People continual opportunities to report their Grievances, and by keeping 'em in a Body (as it were) by their Representatives, render them more able to withstand the Attacks of Foreign Enemies from abroad, or Ill Ministers at home.

But

But after this rate it will prove the means of our utter Ruin; for if this Bulwark of our Liberties be undermin'd by Bribery and Corruption, it will fall upon our own Heads, and open a Breach to our Enemies to march over our Bodies, to extirpate our Religion, and subvert our Constitution. For if a Parliament must be call'd once every Three Years, then have all these Enemies to our Welfare (and all others that may start up upon other Joint-Stocks or Banks hereafter,) an opportunity of breaking into the Legislative Power, at least of trying their Fortune, Ten times in Thirty Years; nay more, a possibility of having it every Two Years for some time; for the greater the Necessities of the Nation grow, the fiercer the Contentions of different Parties are, the oftner in probability will Parliaments be chang'd, and then the tiring out of Good and Virtuous Men, from serving their Countries.

And the Confusions and Distractions of such times; the Envy and Revenge of contending Parties, will give designing Enemies the greater Opportunity of Forestalling the Market, and Stealing into the House unregarded; unregarded I say, in the general disorder

order of a Sickly State, neither able to watch against the Frauds and Corruptions of Lurking Enemies, nor to oppose the Invasion of Open ones : The united Force of *France* and *Spain*, is not more terrible, for we can never be destroy'd from abroad, till we are ruined at home.

This is so plain, that I am confident every True *Englishman* must be convinced of the danger, and will be ready to oppose it, and confront the Insolence of Corruption, which advances towards and attacks the Legislative Power it self. If a Man has any of the Spirit of his Ancestors, any remains of that Virtue, which the *Romans* admir'd in the Ancient *Brittains* when they defended their Country so long and so bravely against the Conquerors of the World, and never Sold one Inch of it, but for the Blood of their Enemies ; he must be warm'd into a Just Indignation against the base Corruptors of our Boroughs ; and urg'd with a true resentment to see the excellent Constitution of the *English* Government, which has cost so many Millions to Retrieve and Preserve, to see I say that Constitution Sully'd, Usurp'd and Overthrown by such hands as theirs.

F

Cor-

Corruption is a Detestable and Odious Crime; when it creeps about servilely and secretly; but who can bear it, when Daring and Insulting? What a strange Confidence was it, that a Man who has in an Extraordinary manner procur'd his Two Sons as well as himself to be lately chosen, should declare, That if he had Forty Sons he would bring 'em all into the House? That he who has already Prostituted the Honour of that August Assembly by delivering Tickets himself at G--- H--- among Porters; does he think that Honourable House will allow of Three, much less of Forty of that Breed?

Birth, Education, and Good Sense, are great Prerogatives; yet these could not support the assuming too great an Influence in that House; And shall this Man dare to hope it? Whatever need the House may have of a Family of Directors, Let not the S----- think they are fit to Succeed the M-----

But yet even this is not so bad, as their Impudence in thinking that they can recommend themselves to the Protection of the Court, while they are guilty of such Proceedings. What Affront can be so great, so provoking

voking as this? Can they think that a Prince of such Niceness of Observation, such Profound Penetration, cannot see into the bottom of this? Can they think that the King who has breath'd an Air of Liberty from his Infancy, and is Descended from a Race of Deliverers of their Country, must not Disdain to have the pretence of his Service made the Stale for the Preserving such a Company? Can they hope to merit Favour by these Methods? as well might the Author of the late Scandalous Satyr think to recommend himself by his Panegyrick on the King, while he Libels the Kingdom in so Infamous a manner, and all Degrees and Orders of Men in it.

Let me add to this, since it arises from the same Consideration, That were the House of Commons tamely to admit such Men among them, it must needs sink the Dignity of that Assembly in the Judgment of a Wise and Just Prince.

Never was there a Man of greater Jealousy and Dissimulation, that made so much use of the Flattery and Corruption of the Age he lived in as *Tiberius*; and yet when he found how far Corruption had got into the Senate,
and

and how quietly and successfully it ruled among 'em, He could not forbear saying often as he went out of the House, *O Wretches, ready for servitude.* As if he who (as *Tacitus* remarks) could endure Liberty the least of all things, yet could not but abhor such base and servile doings. If a Tyrant, a Lover of Luxurious Ease, could not bear this, how odious must it be to a Prince who has a Sense of Liberty, and Courage and Judgment to Assert it?

Those who are concerned in Party and Interest to support the foul Practices in Elections, may say, That it will be inconvenient to proceed immediately upon these Matters; and then fall into their Common-place, *Invectives against the Old Company; and at last close with an Harangue against the East-India Trade in General.* But all this is only to ward off the timely examination of it.

Thus when Resumptions were formerly spoke of, they were for Resumptions, but let us begin (say they) as early as the Restoration of King *Charles II.* They were for Impeachments too, but then they would first fall upon the ill Ministers of the two late Reigns, Dead

or

or Alive. Surely this way of reasoning will not be allow'd: The matter is not doubtful here, but notorious, and has been boasted of by the Parties concern'd: Nay, some Boroughs are frighten'd, and have been told, That all Petitions should be Postpon'd for this Session. If the Old Company, or any of their Members are guilty of Bribery in Elections, let them be punish'd; but why are they to be jumbled together, in this case, unless equally guilty?

Suppose some of the N---E---I---C----- have committed the grossest Bribery, and by that have poison'd the Fountain-Head of our Laws; Are not these Men to be punish'd? No--- let us fall upon the O--- E--- I--- C-----, who brib'd Members of Parliament a great while ago, or let us give the Trade in general to the Dutch: These are the Arguments we must expect from some. Others, that are Fine-Spoken Moderate Men, may say, Let us have a care of putting the House into a Heat, and dividing into Parties, when we have Questions before us of the greatest Importance. The Peace or War of Europe is to be determin'd; and the Successi-

on of the Crown debated. This is to allow, that those, who 'tis fear'd are guilty of Bribery, are grown into a Party: Besides, this Excuse contradicts it self; for if things of such Importance are to come before the House, ought they not, in the first place, to purge themselves? These Questions require the greatest Integrity, as well as the greatest Wisdom, for the good of this Age, and Late Posterity depends upon 'em; And are these Men qualify'd to determine such Questions?

Troy was safe enough when the Horse was without the Walls; but when it was voted in by the Unanimous Multitude, the Directors in the Belly of it took their Opportunity, and let in their Fellow-Adventurers; and then

Quos neque Tydides, &c.

In truth, no body can by any Pretence palliate, or by any Arts delay the immediate Examination of this Matter, without giving shrew'd Signs of being concern'd themselves; nor ought such Deeds of Darknes be try'd at Midnight; but, if the Wisdom of the House think fit, the most Notorious Cases be solemnly

solemnly heard at the Bar of the House.
 Since then it must appear upon the Whole,
 That as all Corruption is dangerous to the
 Publick, from Single Persons, so it is much
 more from Setled Society, and Joint Stocks;
 especially when encourag'd and assisted by peo-
 ple in Power; since the Corruptions of Bo-
 roughs may spread to the utmost extent; and
 the same means which have been made use of
 at one time, may be made use of at another,
 by our worst Enemies; who though they fail
 once, or more times, shall have many to try
 their Fortune again, and so at length over-
 throw the Constitution, the Law, the Liberties
 and the Religion of this Nation.

And Lastly, Since all delay of Exami-
 nation of this matter may prove of the
 worst Consequence at this important Jun-
 cture; It is Humbly hop'd that the House
 of Commons will be pleas'd to look im-
 mediately into this Affair, and either ac-
 quit the Suspected, Honourably; or bring
 the Guilty, and their Mercenary Boroughs,
 to Exemplary Punishment.

And

